THREAD BY BARI WEISS

‹ TWITTER FILES ›

#5

THE REMOVAL OF DONALD TRUMP – PART 3

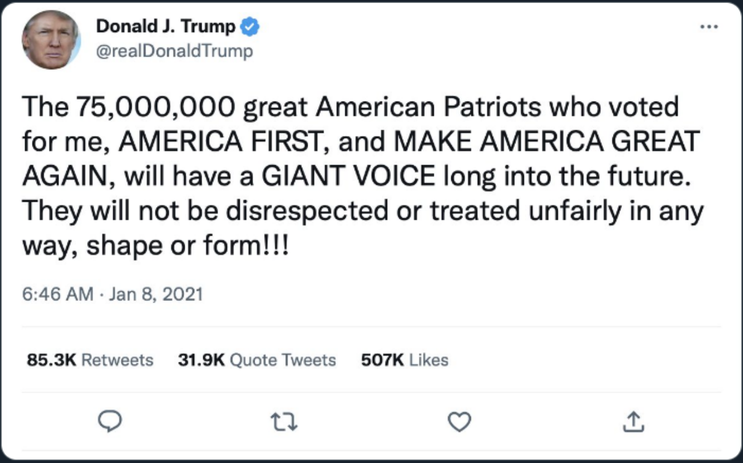
THREAD: THE TWITTER FILES PART FIVE.

@UNGATHEGREAT

THE REMOVAL OF TRUMP FROM TWITTER.

1. On the morning of January 8, President Donald Trump, with one remaining strike before being at risk of permanent suspension from Twitter, tweets twice.

2. 6:46 am: “The 75,000,000 great American Patriots who voted for me, AMERICA FIRST, and MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, will have a GIANT VOICE long into the future. They will not be disrespected or treated unfairly in any way, shape or form!!!”



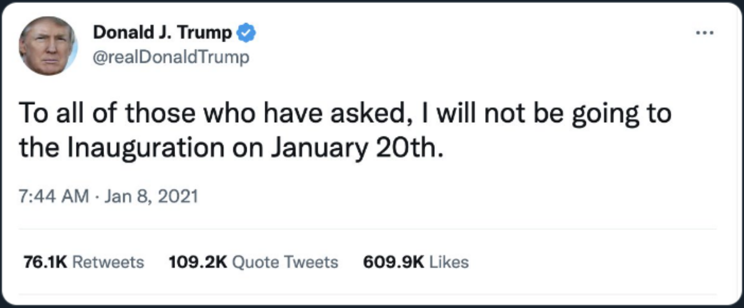
Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

The 75,000,000 great American Patriots who voted for me, AMERICA FIRST, and MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, will have a GIANT VOICE long into the future. They will not be disrespected or treated unfairly in any way, shape or form!!!

6:46 AM · Jan 8, 2021

85.3K Retweets **31.9K** Quote Tweets **507K** Likes

3. 7:44 am: “To all of those who have asked, I will not be going to the Inauguration on January 20th.”



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

To all of those who have asked, I will not be going to the Inauguration on January 20th.

7:44 AM · Jan 8, 2021

76.1K Retweets **109.2K** Quote Tweets **609.9K** Likes

4. For years, Twitter had resisted calls both internal and external to ban Trump on the grounds that blocking a world leader from the platform or removing their controversial tweets would hide important information that people should be able to see and debate.

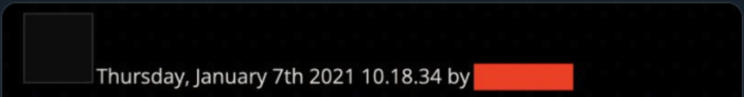
5. “Our mission is to provide a forum that enables people to be informed and to engage their leaders directly,” the company wrote in 2019. Twitter’s aim was to “protect the public’s right to hear from their leaders and to hold them to account.”

World Leaders on Twitter: principles & approach
An update on Tweets from world leaders
https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/worldleaders2019

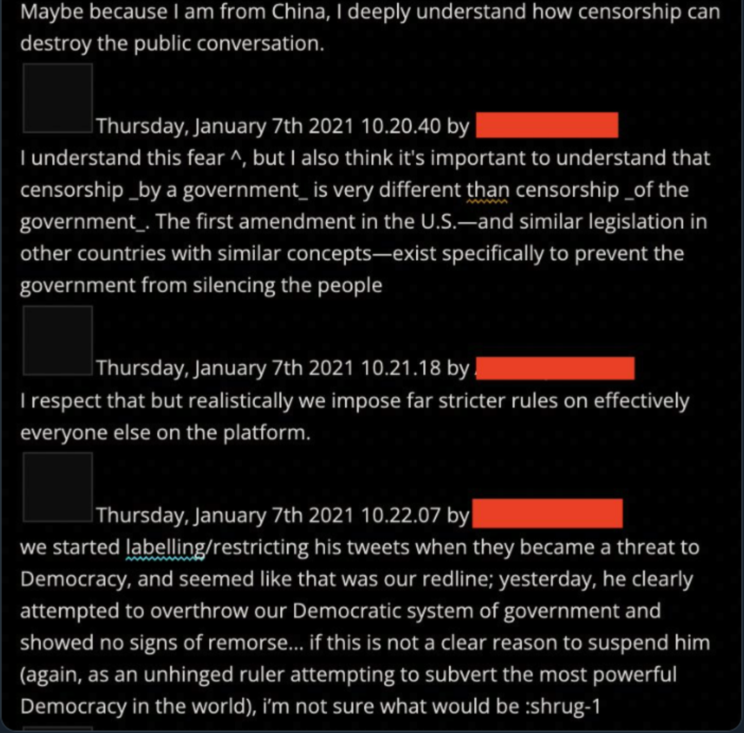
6. But after January 6, as @mtaibbi and @ShellenbergerMD have documented, pressure grew, both inside and outside of Twitter, to ban Trump.

7. There were dissenters inside Twitter.

“Maybe because I am from China,” said one employee on January 7, “I deeply understand how censorship can destroy the public conversation.”



Thursday, January 7th 2021 10.18.34 by [redacted]



Maybe because I am from China, I deeply understand how censorship can destroy the public conversation.

Thursday, January 7th 2021 10.20.40 by [redacted]

I understand this fear ^, but I also think it's important to understand that censorship _by a government_ is very different than censorship _of the government_. The first amendment in the U.S.—and similar legislation in other countries with similar concepts—exist specifically to prevent the government from silencing the people

Thursday, January 7th 2021 10.21.18 by [redacted]

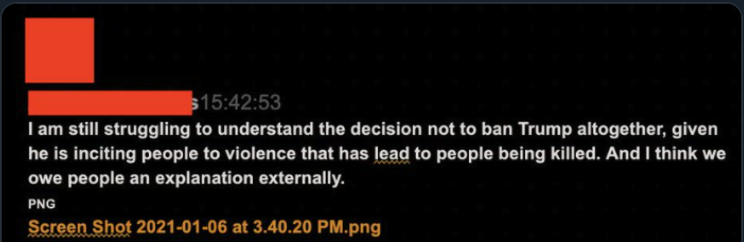
I respect that but realistically we impose far stricter rules on effectively everyone else on the platform.

Thursday, January 7th 2021 10.22.07 by [redacted]

we started labelling/restricting his tweets when they became a threat to Democracy, and seemed like that was our redline; yesterday, he clearly attempted to overthrow our Democratic system of government and showed no signs of remorse... if this is not a clear reason to suspend him (again, as an unhinged ruler attempting to subvert the most powerful Democracy in the world), i'm not sure what would be :shrug-1

8. But voices like that one appear to have been a distinct minority within the company. Across Slack channels, many Twitter employees were upset that Trump hadn't been banned earlier.

9. After January 6, Twitter employees organized to demand their employer ban Trump. "There is a lot of employee advocacy happening," said one Twitter employee.



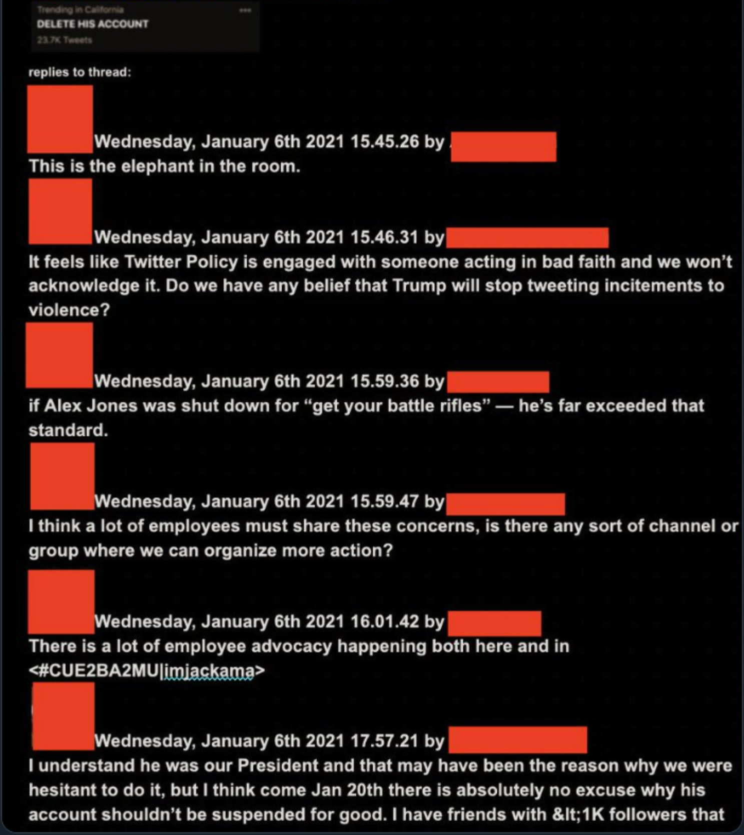
[redacted]

[redacted]15:42:53

I am still struggling to understand the decision not to ban Trump altogether, given he is inciting people to violence that has lead to people being killed. And I think we owe people an explanation externally.

PNG

Screen Shot 2021-01-06 at 3.40.20 PM.png



Trending in California

DELETE HIS ACCOUNT

23.7K Tweets

replies to thread:

[redacted] Wednesday, January 6th 2021 15.45.26 by [redacted]

This is the elephant in the room.

[redacted] Wednesday, January 6th 2021 15.46.31 by [redacted]

It feels like Twitter Policy is engaged with someone acting in bad faith and we won't acknowledge it. Do we have any belief that Trump will stop tweeting incitements to violence?

[redacted] Wednesday, January 6th 2021 15.59.36 by [redacted]

if Alex Jones was shut down for "get your battle rifles" — he's far exceeded that standard.

[redacted] Wednesday, January 6th 2021 15.59.47 by [redacted]

I think a lot of employees must share these concerns, is there any sort of channel or group where we can organize more action?

[redacted] Wednesday, January 6th 2021 16.01.42 by [redacted]

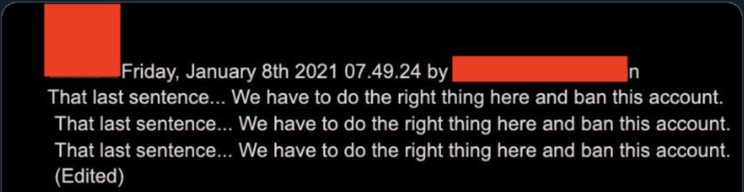
There is a lot of employee advocacy happening both here and in <#CUE2BA2MU|imjackama>

[redacted] Wednesday, January 6th 2021 17.57.21 by [redacted]

I understand he was our President and that may have been the reason why we were hesitant to do it, but I think come Jan 20th there is absolutely no excuse why his account shouldn't be suspended for good. I have friends with &lt;1K followers that

10. "We have to do the right thing and ban this account," said one staffer.

It's "pretty obvious he's going to try to thread the needle of incitement without violating the rules," said another.



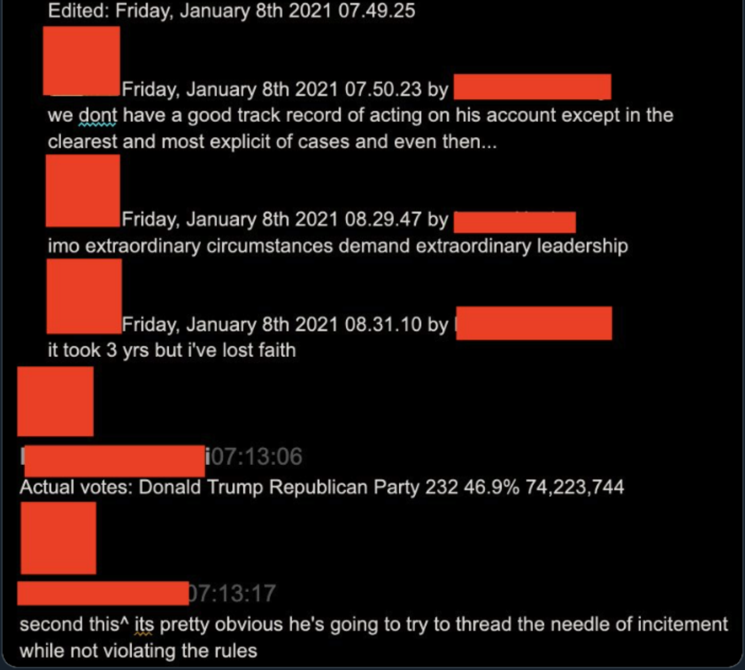
[redacted] Friday, January 8th 2021 07.49.24 by [redacted]

That last sentence... We have to do the right thing here and ban this account.

That last sentence... We have to do the right thing here and ban this account.

That last sentence... We have to do the right thing here and ban this account.

(Edited)



Edited: Friday, January 8th 2021 07.49.25

[redacted] Friday, January 8th 2021 07.50.23 by [redacted]
we dont have a good track record of acting on his account except in the clearest and most explicit of cases and even then...

[redacted] Friday, January 8th 2021 08.29.47 by [redacted]
imo extraordinary circumstances demand extraordinary leadership

[redacted] Friday, January 8th 2021 08.31.10 by [redacted]
it took 3 yrs but i've lost faith

[redacted]

[redacted] 07:13:06
Actual votes: Donald Trump Republican Party 232 46.9% 74,223,744

[redacted]

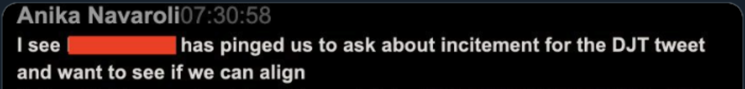
[redacted] 07:13:17
second this^ its pretty obvious he's going to try to thread the needle of incitement while not violating the rules

11. In the early afternoon of January 8, The Washington Post published an open letter signed by over 300 Twitter employees to CEO Jack Dorsey demanding Trump's ban. "We must examine Twitter's complicity in what President-Elect Biden has rightly termed insurrection."

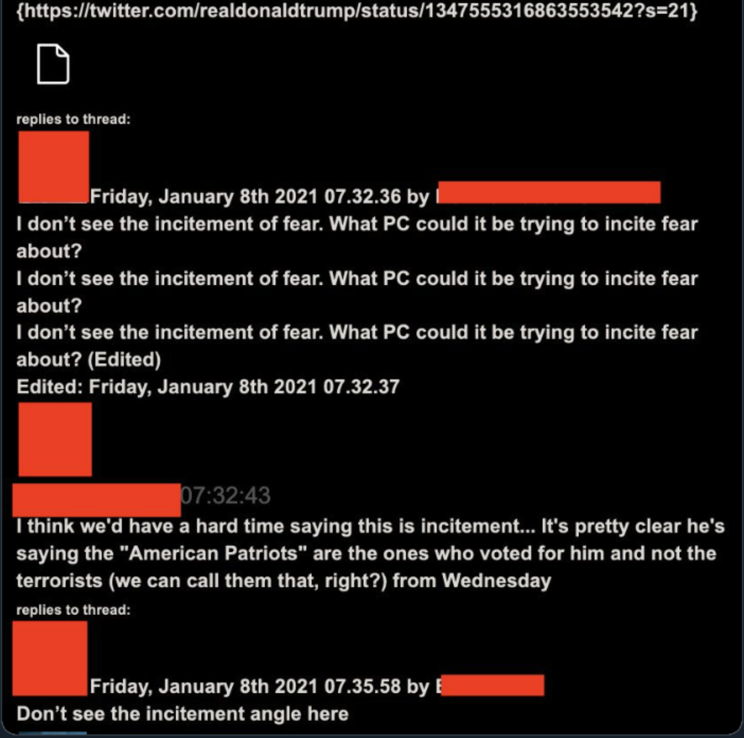
12. But the Twitter staff assigned to evaluate tweets quickly concluded that Trump had *not* violated Twitter's policies."I think we'd have a hard time saying this is incitement," wrote one staffer.

13. "It's pretty clear he's saying the 'American Patriots' are the ones who voted for him and not the terrorists (we can call them that, right?) from Wednesday."

14. Another staffer agreed: "Don't see the incitement angle here."



Anika Navaroli07:30:58
I see [redacted] has pinged us to ask about incitement for the DJT tweet and want to see if we can align



{https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1347555316863553542?s=21}

replies to thread:

[redacted] Friday, January 8th 2021 07.32.36 by [redacted]

I don't see the incitement of fear. What PC could it be trying to incite fear about?

I don't see the incitement of fear. What PC could it be trying to incite fear about?

I don't see the incitement of fear. What PC could it be trying to incite fear about? (Edited)

Edited: Friday, January 8th 2021 07.32.37

[redacted]

[redacted] 07:32:43

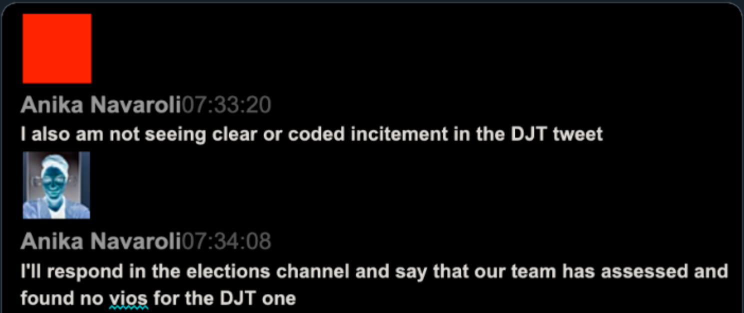
I think we'd have a hard time saying this is incitement... It's pretty clear he's saying the "American Patriots" are the ones who voted for him and not the terrorists (we can call them that, right?) from Wednesday

replies to thread:

[redacted] Friday, January 8th 2021 07.35.58 by [redacted]

Don't see the incitement angle here

15. "I also am not seeing clear or coded incitement in the DJT tweet," wrote Anika Navaroli, a Twitter policy official. "I'll respond in the elections channel and say that our team has assessed and found no vios"—or violations—"for the DJT one."



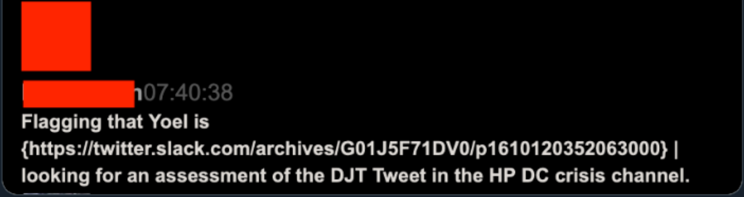
[redacted]

Anika Navaroli07:33:20

I also am not seeing clear or coded incitement in the DJT tweet

Anika Navaroli07:34:08

I'll respond in the elections channel and say that our team has assessed and found no vios for the DJT one

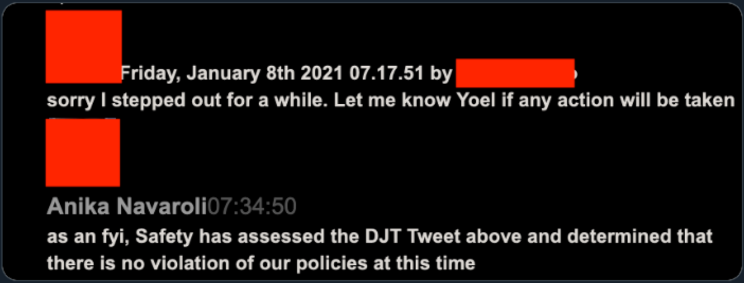


[redacted]

[redacted]07:40:38

Flagging that Yoel is {https://twitter.slack.com/archives/G01J5F71DV0/p1610120352063000} | looking for an assessment of the DJT Tweet in the HP DC crisis channel.

16. She does just that: "as an fyi, Safety has assessed the DJT Tweet above and determined that there is no violation of our policies at this time."



[redacted]

Friday, January 8th 2021 07.17.51 by [redacted]

sorry I stepped out for a while. Let me know Yoel if any action will be taken

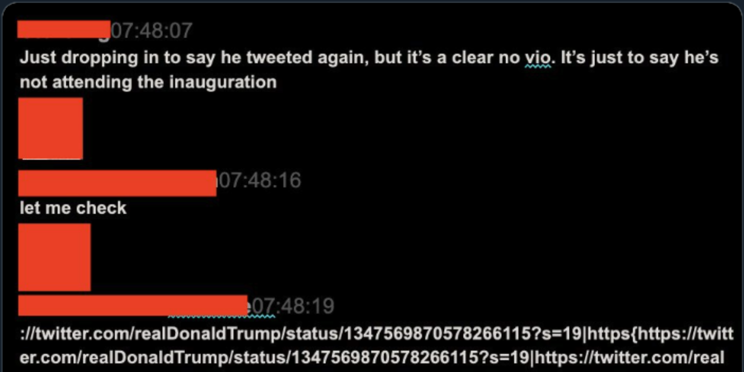
[redacted]

Anika Navaroli07:34:50

as an fyi, Safety has assessed the DJT Tweet above and determined that there is no violation of our policies at this time

17. (Later, Navaroli would testify to the House Jan. 6 committee:"For months I had been begging and anticipating and attempting to raise the reality that if nothing—if we made no intervention into what I saw occuring, people were going to die.")

18. Next, Twitter's safety team decides that Trump's 7:44 am ET tweet is also not in violation. They are unequivocal: "it's a clear no vio. It's just to say he's not attending the inauguration"



[redacted]07:48:07

Just dropping in to say he tweeted again, but it's a clear no vio. It's just to say he's not attending the inauguration

[redacted]

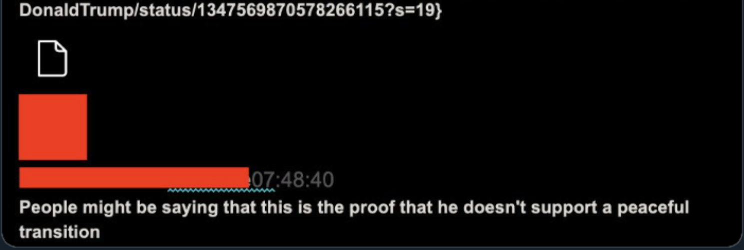
[redacted]07:48:16

let me check

[redacted]

[redacted]07:48:19

://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1347569870578266115?s=19|https{https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1347569870578266115?s=19|https://twitter.com/real



DonaldTrump/status/1347569870578266115?s=19}

[redacted]

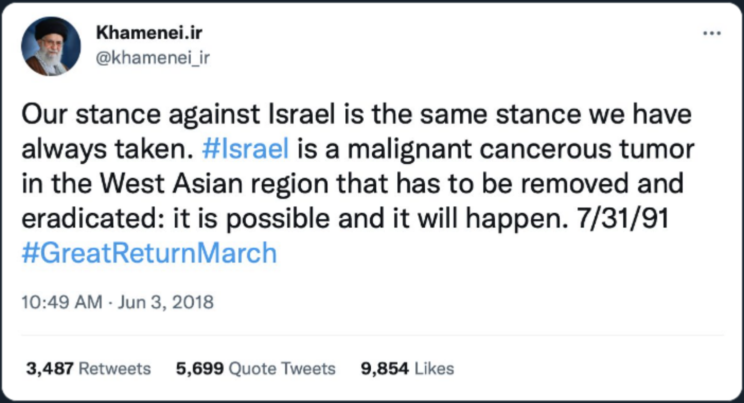
[redacted] 07:48:40

People might be saying that this is the proof that he doesn't support a peaceful transition

19. To understand Twitter's decision to ban Trump, we must consider how Twitter deals with other heads of state and political leaders, including in Iran, Nigeria, and Ethiopia.

20. In June 2018, Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei tweeted, "#Israel is a malignant cancerous tumor in the West Asian region that has to be removed and eradicated: it is possible and it will happen."

Twitter neither deleted the tweet nor banned the Ayatollah.



Khamenei.ir
@khamenei_ir

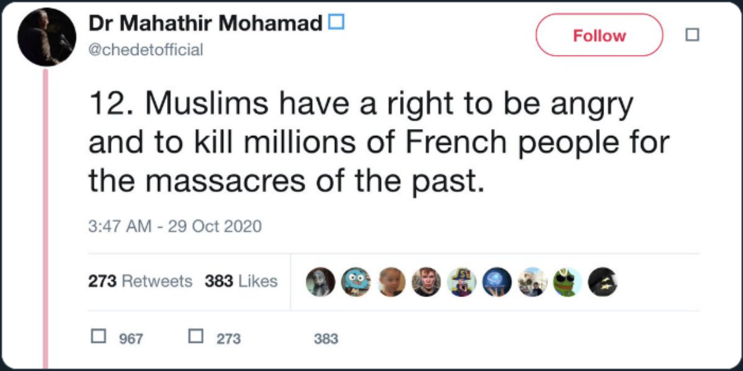
Our stance against Israel is the same stance we have always taken. #Israel is a malignant cancerous tumor in the West Asian region that has to be removed and eradicated: it is possible and it will happen. 7/31/91 #GreatReturnMarch

10:49 AM · Jun 3, 2018

3,487 Retweets **5,699** Quote Tweets **9,854** Likes

21. In October 2020, the former Malaysian Prime Minister said it was "a right" for Muslims to "kill millions of French people."

Twitter deleted his tweet for "glorifying violence," but he remains on the platform. The tweet below was taken from the Wayback Machine:



Dr Mahathir Mohamad
@chedetofficial

12. Muslims have a right to be angry and to kill millions of French people for the massacres of the past.

3:47 AM - 29 Oct 2020

273 Retweets 383 Likes

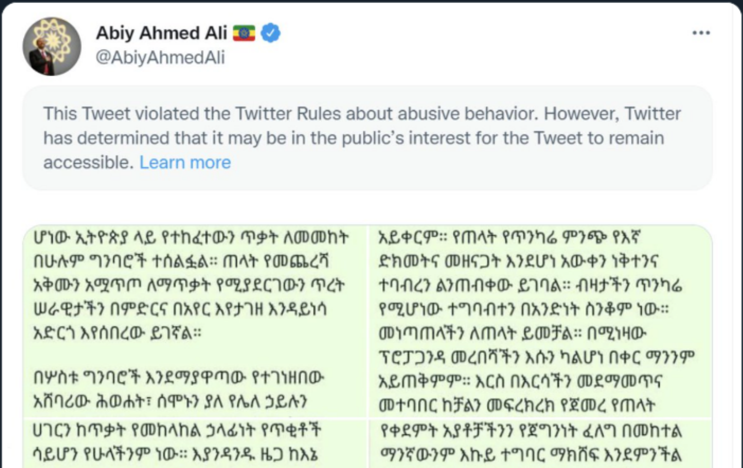
☐ 967 ☐ 273 383

22. Muhammadu Buhari, the President of Nigeria, incited violence against pro-Biafra groups.“Those of us in the fields for 30 months, who went through the war,” he wrote, “will treat them in the language they understand.”

Twitter deleted the tweet but didn't ban Buhari.

23. In October 2021, Twitter allowed Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to call on citizens to take up arms against the Tigray region.

Twitter allowed the tweet to remain up, and did not ban the prime minister.



Abiy Ahmed Ali 🇪🇹
@AbiyAhmedAli

This Tweet violated the Twitter Rules about abusive behavior. However, Twitter has determined that it may be in the public’s interest for the Tweet to remain accessible. Learn more

ሆነው ኢትዮጵያ ላይ የተከፈተውን ጥቃት ለመመከት
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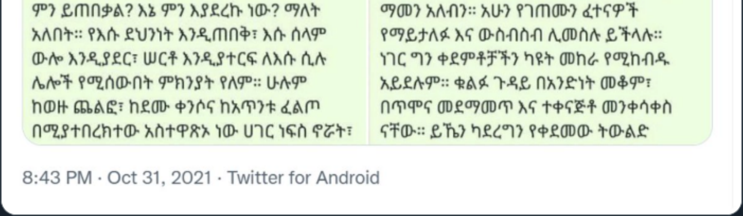

ምን ይጠበቃል? እኔ ምን እያደረኩ ነው? ማለት
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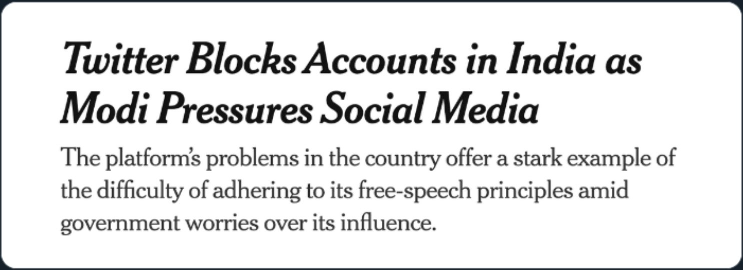
8:43 PM · Oct 31, 2021 · Twitter for Android

24. In early February 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government threatened to arrest Twitter employees in India, and to incarcerate them for up to seven years after they restored hundreds of accounts that had been critical of him.

Twitter did not ban Modi.

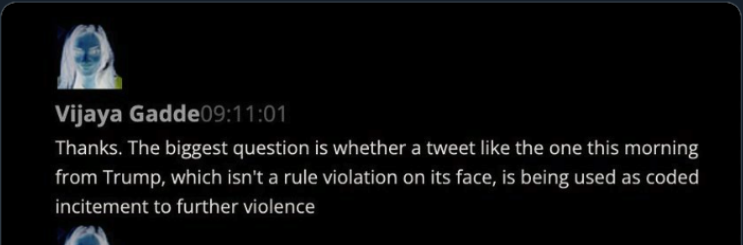


Twitter Blocks Accounts in India as Modi Pressures Social Media

The platform's problems in the country offer a stark example of the difficulty of adhering to its free-speech principles amid government worries over its influence.

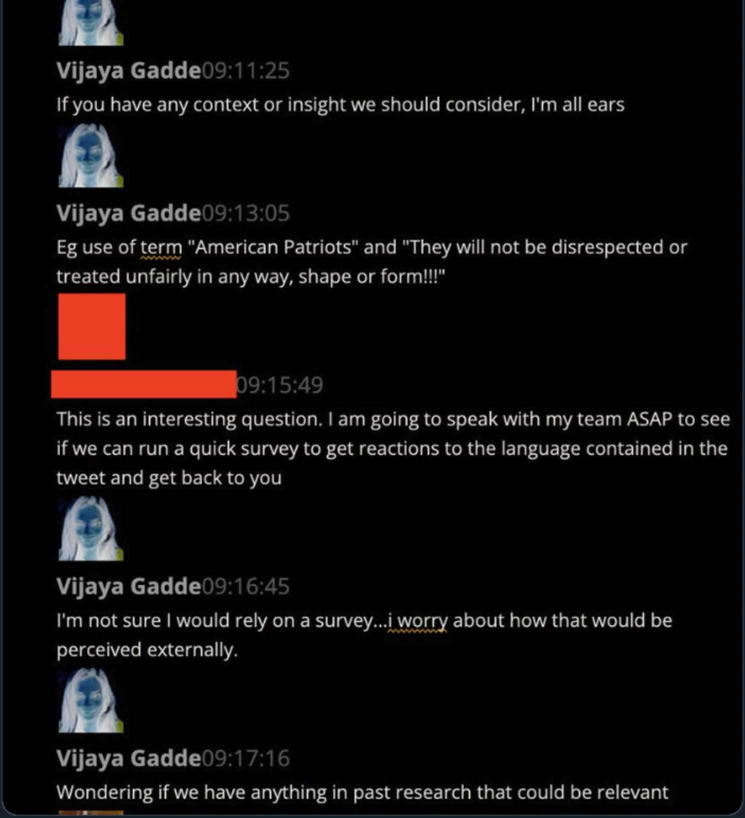
25. But Twitter executives did ban Trump, even though key staffers said that Trump had not incited violence—not even in a "coded" way.

26. Less than 90 minutes after Twitter employees had determined that Trump's tweets were not in violation of Twitter policy, Vijaya Gadde—Twitter's Head of Legal, Policy, and Trust—asked whether it could, in fact, be "coded incitement to further violence."



Vijaya Gadde09:11:01

Thanks. The biggest question is whether a tweet like the one this morning from Trump, which isn't a rule violation on its face, is being used as coded incitement to further violence



Vijaya Gadde09:11:25

If you have any context or insight we should consider, I'm all ears

Vijaya Gadde09:13:05

Eg use of term "American Patriots" and "They will not be disrespected or treated unfairly in any way, shape or form!!!"

[redacted]

[redacted]09:15:49

This is an interesting question. I am going to speak with my team ASAP to see if we can run a quick survey to get reactions to the language contained in the tweet and get back to you

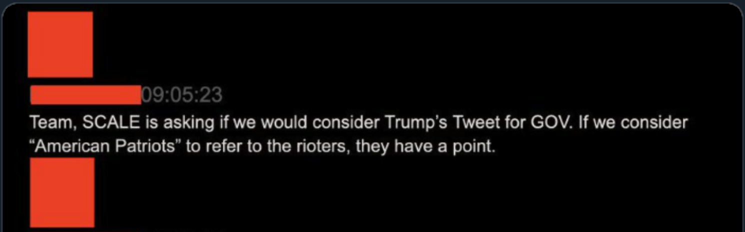
Vijaya Gadde09:16:45

I'm not sure I would rely on a survey...i worry about how that would be perceived externally.

Vijaya Gadde09:17:16

Wondering if we have anything in past research that could be relevant

27. A few minutes later, Twitter employees on the "scaled enforcement team" suggest that Trump's tweet may have violated Twitter's Glorification of Violence policy—if you interpreted the phrase "American Patriots" to refer to the rioters.

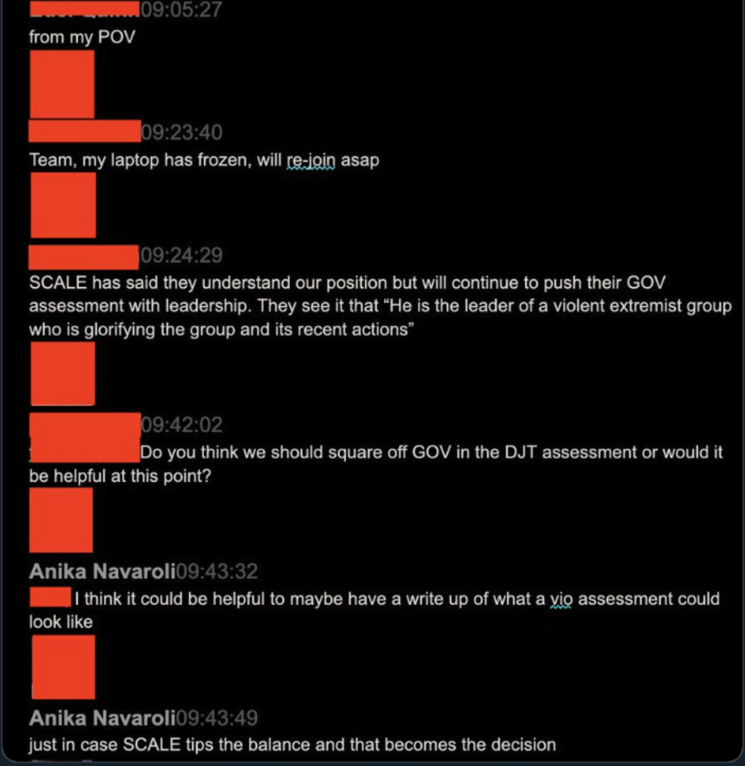


[redacted]

[redacted]09:05:23

Team, SCALE is asking if we would consider Trump's Tweet for GOV. If we consider "American Patriots" to refer to the rioters, they have a point.

[redacted]



[redacted]09:05:27

from my POV

[redacted]

[redacted]09:23:40

Team, my laptop has frozen, will re-join asap

[redacted]

[redacted]09:24:29

SCALE has said they understand our position but will continue to push their GOV assessment with leadership. They see it that "He is the leader of a violent extremist group who is glorifying the group and its recent actions"

[redacted]

[redacted]09:42:02

Do you think we should square off GOV in the DJT assessment or would it be helpful at this point?

[redacted]

Anika Navaroli09:43:32

[redacted] I think it could be helpful to maybe have a write up of what a vio assessment could look like

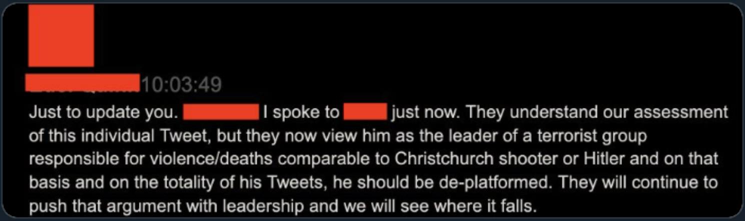
[redacted]

Anika Navaroli09:43:49

just in case SCALE tips the balance and that becomes the decision

28. Things escalate from there.

Members of that team came to "view him as the leader of a terrorist group responsible for violence/deaths comparable to Christchurch shooter or Hitler and on that basis and on the totality of his Tweets, he should be de-platformed."



[redacted]

[redacted]10:03:49

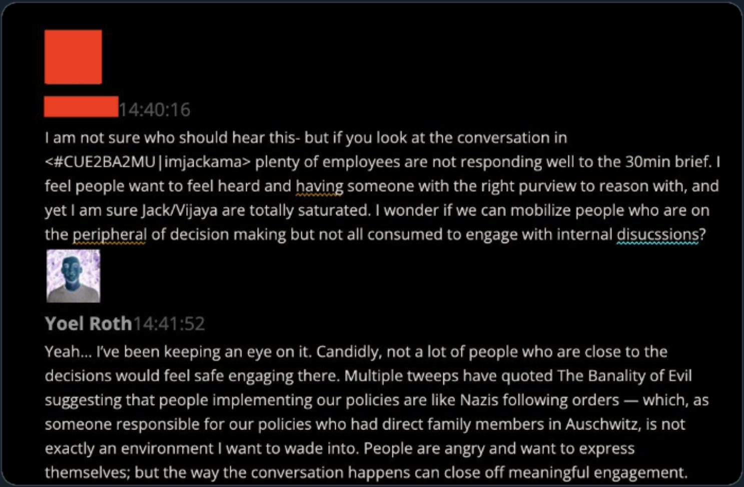
Just to update you. [redacted] I spoke to [redacted] just now. They understand our assessment of this individual Tweet, but they now view him as the leader of a terrorist group responsible for violence/deaths comparable to Christchurch shooter or Hitler and on that basis and on the totality of his Tweets, he should be de-platformed. They will continue to push that argument with leadership and we will see where it falls.

29. Two hours later, Twitter executives host a 30-minute all-staff meeting.

Jack Dorsey and Vijaya Gadde answer staff questions as to why Trump wasn't banned yet.

But they make some employees angrier.

30. "Multiple tweeps [Twitter employees] have quoted the Banality of Evil suggesting that people implementing our policies are like Nazis following orders," relays Yoel Roth to a colleague.



[redacted]

[redacted] 14:40:16

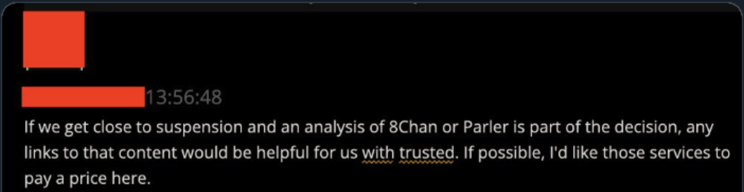
I am not sure who should hear this- but if you look at the conversation in <#CUE2BA2MU|imjackama> plenty of employees are not responding well to the 30min brief. I feel people want to feel heard and having someone with the right purview to reason with, and yet I am sure Jack/Vijaya are totally saturated. I wonder if we can mobilize people who are on the peripheral of decision making but not all consumed to engage with internal disucssions?

Yoel Roth 14:41:52

Yeah... I've been keeping an eye on it. Candidly, not a lot of people who are close to the decisions would feel safe engaging there. Multiple tweeps have quoted The Banality of Evil suggesting that people implementing our policies are like Nazis following orders — which, as someone responsible for our policies who had direct family members in Auschwitz, is not exactly an environment I want to wade into. People are angry and want to express themselves; but the way the conversation happens can close off meaningful engagement.

31. Dorsey requested simpler language to explain Trump's suspension.

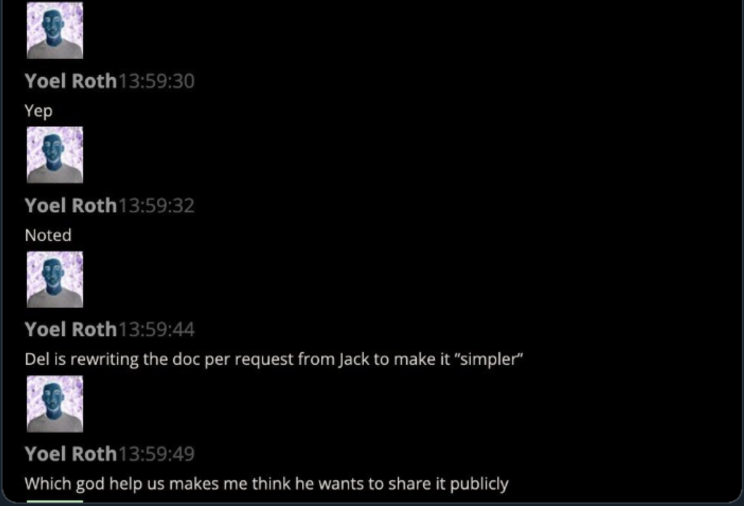
Roth wrote, "god help us [this] makes me think he wants to share it publicly"



[redacted]

[redacted] 13:56:48

If we get close to suspension and an analysis of 8Chan or Parler is part of the decision, any links to that content would be helpful for us with trusted. If possible, I'd like those services to pay a price here.



Yoel Roth 13:59:30

Yep

Yoel Roth 13:59:32

Noted

Yoel Roth 13:59:44

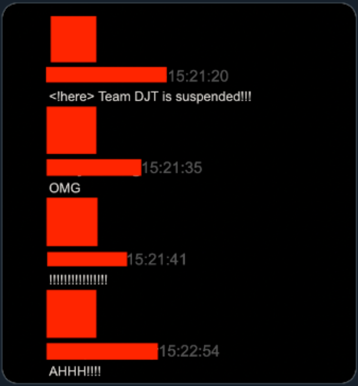
Del is rewriting the doc per request from Jack to make it "simpler"

Yoel Roth 13:59:49

Which god help us makes me think he wants to share it publicly

32. One hour later, Twitter announces Trump's permanent suspension "due to the risk of further incitement of violence."

33. Many at Twitter were ecstatic.



[redacted]

[redacted] 15:21:20

<!here> Team DJT is suspended!!!

[redacted]

[redacted] 15:21:35

OMG

[redacted]

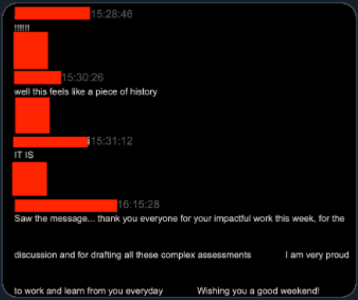
[redacted] 15:21:41

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[redacted]

[redacted] 15:22:54

AHHH!!!!



[redacted] 15:28:46

!!!!!!

[redacted]

[redacted] 15:30:26

well this feels like a piece of history

[redacted]

[redacted] 15:31:12

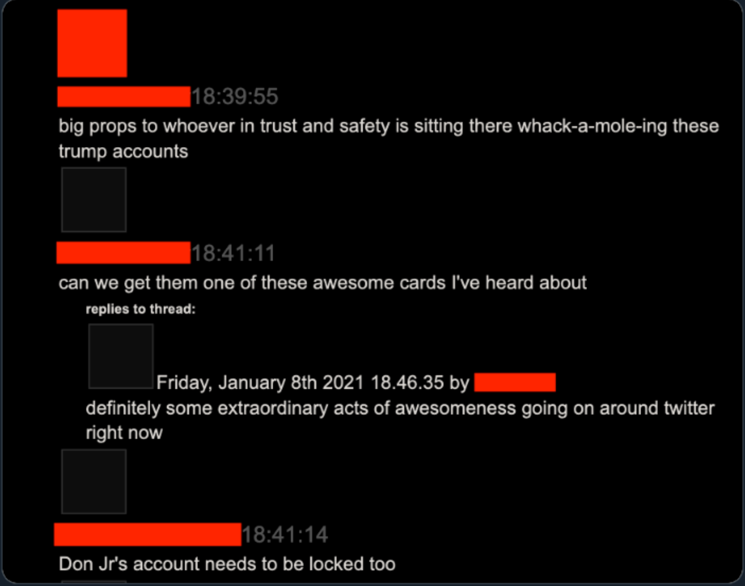
IT IS

[redacted]

[redacted] 16:15:28

Saw the message... thank you everyone for your impactful work this week, for the discussion and for drafting all these complex assessments I am very proud to work and learn from you everyday Wishing you a good weekend!

34. And congratulatory: "big props to whoever in trust and safety is sitting there whack-a-mole-ing these trump accounts"



[redacted]

[redacted] 18:39:55

big props to whoever in trust and safety is sitting there whack-a-mole-ing these trump accounts

[redacted] 18:41:11

can we get them one of these awesome cards I've heard about

replies to thread:

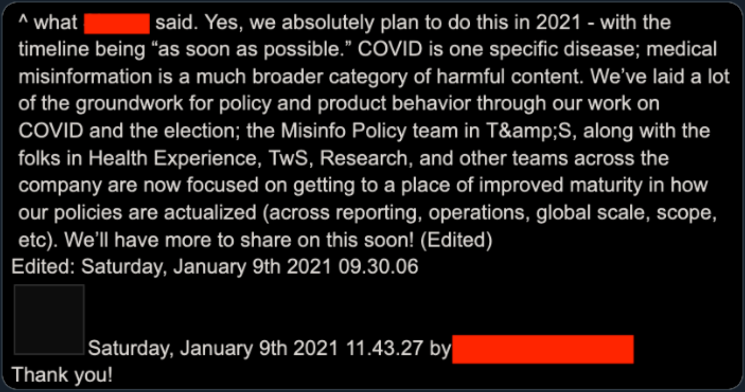
Friday, January 8th 2021 18.46.35 by [redacted]

definitely some extraordinary acts of awesomeness going on around twitter right now

[redacted] 18:41:14

Don Jr's account needs to be locked too

35. By the next day, employees expressed eagerness to tackle “medical misinformation” as soon as possible:



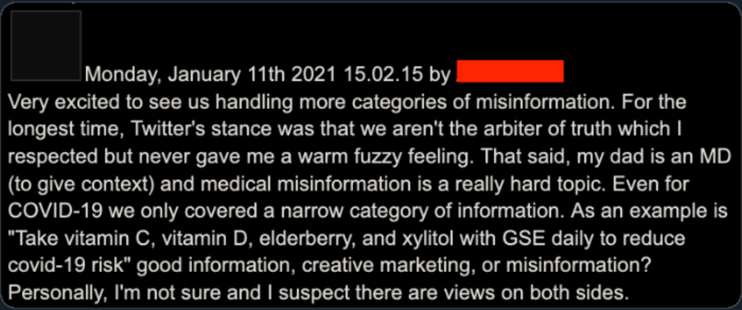
^ what [redacted] said. Yes, we absolutely plan to do this in 2021 - with the timeline being “as soon as possible.” COVID is one specific disease; medical misinformation is a much broader category of harmful content. We’ve laid a lot of the groundwork for policy and product behavior through our work on COVID and the election; the Misinfo Policy team in T&amp;S, along with the folks in Health Experience, TwS, Research, and other teams across the company are now focused on getting to a place of improved maturity in how our policies are actualized (across reporting, operations, global scale, scope, etc). We’ll have more to share on this soon! (Edited)

Edited: Saturday, January 9th 2021 09.30.06

Saturday, January 9th 2021 11.43.27 by [redacted]

Thank you!

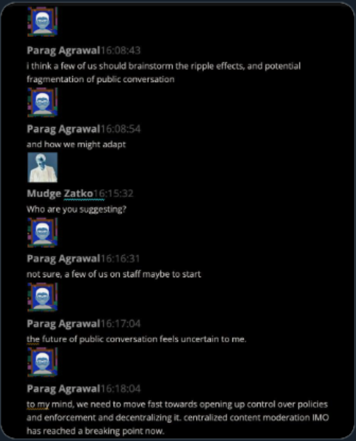
36. “For the longest time, Twitter’s stance was that we aren’t the arbiter of truth,” wrote another employee, “which I respected but never gave me a warm fuzzy feeling.”



Monday, January 11th 2021 15.02.15 by [redacted]

Very excited to see us handling more categories of misinformation. For the longest time, Twitter's stance was that we aren't the arbiter of truth which I respected but never gave me a warm fuzzy feeling. That said, my dad is an MD (to give context) and medical misinformation is a really hard topic. Even for COVID-19 we only covered a narrow category of information. As an example is "Take vitamin C, vitamin D, elderberry, and xylitol with GSE daily to reduce covid-19 risk" good information, creative marketing, or misinformation? Personally, I'm not sure and I suspect there are views on both sides.

37. But Twitter's COO Parag Agrawal—who would later succeed Dorsey as CEO—told Head of Security Mudge Zatko: "I think a few of us should brainstorm the ripple effects" of Trump's ban. Agrawal added: "centralized content moderation IMO has reached a breaking point now."



Parag Agrawal 16:08:43
i think a few of us should brainstorm the ripple effects, and potential fragmentation of public conversation

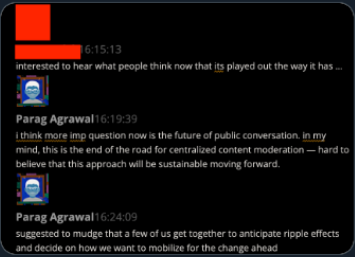
Parag Agrawal 16:08:54
and how we might adapt

Mudge Zatko 16:15:32
Who are you suggesting?

Parag Agrawal 16:16:31
not sure, a few of us on staff maybe to start

Parag Agrawal 16:17:04
the future of public conversation feels uncertain to me.

Parag Agrawal 16:18:04
to my mind, we need to move fast towards opening up control over policies and enforcement and decentralizing it. centralized content moderation IMO has reached a breaking point now.



[redacted]

[redacted] 16:15:13
interested to hear what people think now that its played out the way it has ...

Parag Agrawal 16:19:39
i think more imp question now is the future of public conversation. in my mind, this is the end of the road for centralized content moderation — hard to believe that this approach will be sustainable moving forward.

Parag Agrawal 16:24:09
suggested to mudge that a few of us get together to anticipate ripple effects and decide on how we want to mobilize for the change ahead

38. Outside the United States, Twitter's decision to ban Trump raised alarms, including with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Prime Minister Angela Merkel, and Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

39. Macron told an audience he didn't "want to live in a democracy where the key decisions" were made by private players. "I want it to be decided by a law voted by your representative, or by regulation, governance, democratically discussed and approved by democratic leaders."

40. Merkel's spokesperson called Twitter's decision to ban Trump from its platform "problematic" and added that the freedom of opinion is of "elementary significance."

Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny criticized the ban as "an unacceptable act of censorship."

41. Whether you agree with Navalny and Macron or the executives at Twitter, we hope this latest installment of #TheTwitterFiles gave you insight into that unprecedented decision.

42. From the outset, our goal in investigating this story was to discover and document the steps leading up to the banning of Trump and to put that choice into context.

43. Ultimately, the concerns about Twitter's efforts to censor news about Hunter Biden's laptop, blacklist disfavored views, and ban a president aren't about the past choices of executives in a social media company.

44. They're about the power of a handful of people at a private company to influence the public discourse and democracy.

45. This was reported by @ShellenbergerMD, @IsaacGrafstein, @SnoozyWeiss, @Olivia_Reingold, @petersavodnik, @NellieBowles. Follow all of our work at The Free Press: @TheFP

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